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Pattern of conferences

Report of the Fifth Committee

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I. Introduction

1. At its 2nd plenary meeting, on 19 September 2003, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, decided to include in the agenda of its fifty-eighth session the item entitled "Pattern of conferences" and to allocate it to the Fifth Committee.

2. The Fifth Committee considered the item at its 4th, 5th and 30th meetings, on 13 and 14 October and 23 December 2003. Statements and observations made in the course of the Committee's consideration of the item are reflected in the relevant summary records (A/C.5/58/SR.4, 5 and 30).

3. For its consideration of the item, the Committee had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Committee on Conferences;[1]

(b) Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions;[2]

(c) Report of the Secretary-General on the filling of the remaining vacancies in the Arabic and English Units in the Interpretation Section at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/57/783);

(d) Report of the Secretary-General on the utilization of conference facilities and services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/57/809);

(e) Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/58/7/Add.1 and Corr.1);

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 32* (A/58/32).
[2] Ibid., *Supplement No. 7*.

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(f) Report of the Secretary-General on pattern of conferences (A/58/194 and Corr.1-3 and Add.1);

(g) Report of the Secretary-General on the reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (A/58/213).

II. Consideration of draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.42

4. At its 30th meeting, on 23 December, the representative of Algeria, Vice-Chairman of the Committee, and coordinator of the informal consultations on this item, introduced a draft resolution entitled "Pattern of conferences" (A/C.5/58/L.42).

5. At the same meeting, the Committee adopted draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.42 without a vote (see para. 6).

III. Recommendation of the Fifth Committee

6. The Fifth Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution:

Pattern of conferences

The General Assembly,

Recalling its relevant resolutions, including resolutions 40/243 of 18 December 1985, 41/213 of 19 December 1986, 43/222 A to E of 21 December 1988, 51/211 A to E of 18 December 1996, 52/214 of 22 December 1997, 53/208 A to E of 18 December 1998, 54/248 of 23 December 1999, 55/222 of 23 December 2000, 56/242 of 24 December 2001, 56/254 D of 27 March 2002, 56/262 of 15 February 2002, 56/287 of 27 June 2002, 57/283 A of 20 December 2002 and 57/283 B of 15 April 2003,

Reaffirming its resolution 42/207 C of 11 December 1987, in which it requested the Secretary-General to ensure the equal treatment of the official languages of the United Nations,

Also reaffirming the provisions relevant to conference services of its resolutions on multilingualism,

Having considered the report of the Committee on Conferences[1] and the relevant reports of the Secretary-General,[2]

Having also considered the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions,[3] in particular paragraph I.84 thereof, and the second report of the Committee,[4]

I
Calendar of conferences and meetings

1. *Notes with appreciation* the work of the Committee on Conferences;

2. *Approves* the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2004-2005, as submitted by the Committee on Conferences,[5] taking into account the observations of the Committee, and subject to the provisions of the present resolution;

3. *Authorizes* the Committee on Conferences to make any adjustments to the calendar of conferences and meetings for 2004-2005 that may become necessary as a result of actions and decisions taken by the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session;

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[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 32* and corrigendum (A/58/32 and Corr.1).

[2] A/58/194, and Corr.1 and 2 and Add.1, A/58/213, A/57/783 and A/57/809.

[3] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 7* (A/58/7).

[4] A/58/7/Add.1 and Corr.1.

[5] To be issued in *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 32* (A/58/32).

4. *Notes with satisfaction* that the Secretariat has taken into account the arrangements referred to in General Assembly resolutions 53/208 A of 18 December 1998, 54/248, 55/222, 56/242 and 57/283 B concerning Orthodox Good Friday and the official holidays of Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha, and requests all intergovernmental bodies to continue to observe those decisions when planning their meetings;

II

A. Utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

1. *Notes* the improvements in the utilization of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa in response to section II.A, paragraph 21, of its resolution 57/283 B, and requests the Secretary-General to continue to explore all possible options to increase further the utilization of the conference centre;

2. *Requests* the Committee on Conferences to consult with those bodies that have consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated resources of the past three sessions, with a view to making appropriate recommendations in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources and urges the secretariats and bureaux of bodies that underutilize their conference resources to work more closely with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and to consider changes to their programme of work, as appropriate, including adjustments based on previous patterns for recurring agenda items, with a view to making improvements in their underutilization factors;

3. *Welcomes* the efforts that are being made to improve utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, as set out in the report of the Secretary-General;[6]

4. *Recalls* its several resolutions including resolution 57/283 B, paragraph 9, and reaffirms that all meetings of Nairobi-based United Nations bodies shall take place in Nairobi, except as otherwise authorized by the General Assembly or the Committee on Conferences acting on its behalf;

5. *Reiterates its encouragement* to the Secretary-General to continue to intensify the efforts being made by the United Nations Office at Nairobi to attract more meetings to its facilities;

6. *Strongly discourages* any invitation for hosting meetings which would violate the headquarters rule, in particular for the United Nations Office at Nairobi and other United Nations centres with a low utilization level;

7. *Emphasizes* that all duty stations shall be given adequate resources for the effective and efficient discharge of their respective mandates;

8. *Reiterates its concern* over the delay in the process of filling the remaining vacancies in the interpretation and translation services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, and calls for the expeditious filling of the vacancies, and requests the Secretary-General to report thereon, through the Committee on Conferences, to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session;

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[6] A/57/809.

9. *Regrets* the difficulties, including the delay, in fully staffing the Arabic interpretation services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi and requests the Secretary-General to take adequate measures to ensure the filling of those posts without further delay, and to report thereon, through the Committee on Conferences, to the General Assembly, at its fifty-ninth session;

10. *Notes* the importance of meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States for the smooth functioning of the sessions of intergovernmental bodies, and requests the Secretary-General to ensure that, as far as possible, all requests for conference services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States are met;

11. *Notes with concern* that the utilization rate of interpretation services and conference facilities to the regional and other major groupings has declined;

12. *Notes with appreciation* that 100 per cent of requests by regional and other major groupings for conference facilities were met, according to the current methodology for recording statistics;

13. *Emphasizes* the importance of providing the highest quality services to Member States in all duty stations and, in this regard, requests the Secretary-General to take appropriate measures in order to address current disparities in the quality of conference services between duty stations;

14. *Requests* the Secretary-General to continue to include in future reports the utilization rates of interpretation service and conference facilities at all duty stations;

15. *Notes* that the Secretary-General has submitted his report[7] pursuant to section II.A, paragraph 14, of its resolution 57/283 B, in which it reaffirmed its decision to include all necessary resources in the budget for the biennium 2004-2005 to provide interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States upon request by those groups, on an ad hoc basis, in accordance with established practice;

B. Reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management

1. *Reaffirms* that the Fifth Committee is the appropriate Main Committee of the General Assembly entrusted with responsibilities for administrative and budgetary matters;

2. *Welcomes* the initial steps taken by the Secretary-General in the implementation of the reform measures put forward in his report[8] in accordance with section II.B of its resolution 57/283 B, and encourages the continued implementation of the measures described in paragraph 52 of his report on the reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management,[9] subject to the provisions of the present resolution;

3. *Reiterates its request* contained in section II.B, paragraph 12, of its resolution 57/283 B;

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[7] A/58/397.
[8] A/57/289.
[9] A/58/213.

4. *Stresses* that the reform of the Department should be aimed at improving the quality of documents and their timely production and delivery and the quality of conference services provided to Member States, with a view to meeting their needs as efficiently and effectively as possible and in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly;

5. *Also stresses* that the reforms of the Department should be aimed equally at increasing the productivity of the Department in delivering all services in accordance with relevant resolutions;

6. *Notes* that the reform will include a comprehensive study of the integrated global management, in accordance with section II.B, paragraph 8, of resolution 58/283, in consultation with the Office of Internal Oversight Services and with the full participation of all duty stations in a collaborative and consultative process, with a view to reaching conclusions that are both practical and comprehensive, and requests the Secretary-General to keep the General Assembly informed on the matter through the Committee on Conferences;

7. *Requests* the Secretary-General to further develop an effective measure to strengthen the responsibility and accountability system within the Secretariat, in order to ensure the timely submission of documents for processing, and to submit a comprehensive report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, through the Committee on Conferences;

8. *Notes* the intention of the Secretary-General to establish a Secretariat task force with broad participation to conduct a comprehensive study of workload standards and performance measurement and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, through the Committee on Conferences;

9. *Requests* the Secretary-General to conduct a thorough cost-benefit study of summary records and to review the list of bodies entitled to them, in full consultation with all relevant intergovernmental bodies, with a view to assessing the need for such records, and to explore the possibility of delivering them in a more efficient and effective manner and to report thereon, through the Committee on Conferences, to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session;

10. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that the ongoing and planned work on workload standards and performance measures specifically develop quantitative methods and indicators to assess productivity, efficiency and cost-effectiveness and to do so also for the quality of services, and to report thereon, through the Committee on Conferences, to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session;

11. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that the ongoing and planned work on workload standards and performance measures specifically develop qualitative methods and indicators to assess productivity, efficiency and cost-effectiveness and to do so also for the quality of services, and to report thereon, through the Committee on Conferences, to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session;

12. *Recognizes* that the satisfaction of Member States is a key performance indicator in conference management and services and requests the Secretary-General to continue to include a user-oriented approach towards performance management on a wider scope, to make proposals to the General Assembly on the incorporation

of such an approach into the performance-management methods of the Department and to incorporate the results of such an approach, as well as the results of its own internal evaluation of the Department, into future proposals for the improvement of the operation of the Department;

III
Documentation- and publication-related matters

1. *Emphasizes* the importance of the equality of the six official languages of the United Nations;

2. *Reaffirms* section B of its resolution 52/214 and emphasizes that any reduction in the length of reports should affect neither the quality of presentation nor the content of the reports;

3. *Notes* that reports not originating from the Secretariat comprise the bulk of the documents issued[10] and requests the Secretary-General to examine ways and means to achieve compliance with the relevant guideline on page limits and to report on the matter to the General Assembly through the Committee on Conferences;

4. *Also notes* the relative improvement in the timely issuance of documents for the fifty-eighth session;

5. *Notes with concern* that the six-week rule for issuance of documents is not fully complied with owing to, inter alia, the late submission of documents by author departments in violation of relevant rules and requests the Secretary-General to take corrective measures so as to ensure strict compliance with the six-week rule for the timely issuance of documentation in view of the impact of their late issuance on the functioning of intergovernmental and expert bodies;

6. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that the rules concerning simultaneous distribution of documents in all official languages are followed with respect to the posting of parliamentary documentation on the Official Document System and on the United Nations web site, in keeping with section III, paragraph 5, of General Assembly resolution 55/222;

7. *Notes with concern* paragraph 61 of the report of the Secretary-General,[11] reaffirms that there should be no exceptions to the rule that documents must be distributed in all official languages, and emphasizes the principle that all official documents must be distributed simultaneously in all official languages before they are made available on United Nations web sites;

8. *Reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to ensure that documents are available in accordance with the six-week rule for their distribution simultaneously in the six official languages;

9. *Also reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to ensure that translation, in principle, reflects the specificity of each language to the extent possible in order to achieve concordance in resolutions;

[10] See A/57/228, paras. 79-86.
[11] A/58/194.

10. *Recalls* section III, paragraphs 25, 26 and 27 of resolution 57/283 B, expresses its concern that the report requested in paragraph 28 of the resolution was not submitted, urges the Secretary-General to provide Member States promptly with the outcome of the consultations referred to in this context, and decides to revert to this issue at its fifty-ninth session;

11. *Reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to direct all departments to include the following elements in reports originating in the Secretariat:

(a) Summary of the report;

(b) Consolidated conclusions, recommendations and other proposed actions;

(c) Relevant background information;

12. *Encourages* intergovernmental and expert bodies to include the above-mentioned elements, where appropriate, in their reports to the General Assembly;

13. *Requests* that all documents submitted to legislative organs by the Secretariat, intergovernmental and expert bodies for consideration and action have conclusions and recommendations in bold print;

14. *Notes with concern* the delay in the issuance of verbatim and summary records and, in this regard, requests the Secretary-General to take appropriate measures to ameliorate the situation, with a view to issuing them in a timely fashion;

15. *Also notes with concern* the non-compliance with article 59 of the rules of procedures of the General Assembly and requests the Secretary-General to ensure the communication of resolutions adopted by the General Assembly to Member States within fifteen days after the closure of the session;

16. *Further notes with concern* the decrease in the percentage of documents available in Arabic issued by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and requests the Secretary-General to take immediate measures to ensure the 100 per cent issuance in Arabic of all the Commission's documents and publications by the biennium 2004-2005;

17. *Reaffirms* section B of its resolution 52/214 and re-emphasizes that any reduction in the length of documents should not adversely affect either the quality of the presentation or the substance of the documents and that the reduction should be implemented in a flexible manner with respect to the consolidated reports;

IV
Translation- and interpretation-related matters

1. *Notes with concern* the high rate of self-revision in some of the official languages, as well as translation-related problems presented in some languages;

2. *Requests* the Secretary-General, in updating the workloads standards, to address the question of the appropriate level of self-revision that is consistent with quality in all official languages;

3. *Reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General contained in section IV, paragraph 1, of its resolution 55/222;

V
Information technology

1. *Emphasizes* that the primary goal of the introduction of new technology should be to enhance the quality, production, cost-effectiveness and efficiency of conference services, in accordance with legislative mandates;

2. *Notes* the relative progress achieved thus far across duty stations in integrating information technology into management and documentation-processing systems;

3. *Also notes* the particular situation of the United Nations Office at Nairobi, urges the Secretary-General to take steps to ensure that modern conference management and documentation practices, systems and technology are shared across all duty stations in an institutionalized manner and requests the Secretary-General to report thereon, through the Committee on Conferences, to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session;

VI

1. *Requests* the Secretary-General to submit a consolidated report on all actions mandated in the present resolution to the Committee on Conferences at its next session;

2. *Recalls* the need to consider biennialization and triennialization of the agenda items of the Fifth Committee, in accordance with the guidelines on the rationalization of the agenda of the General Assembly outlined in paragraph 5 (c) of annex I to its resolution 48/264 of 29 July 1994 and in its resolution 58/126 of 19 December 2003 on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly;

3. *Requests* the Secretary-General, in the context of paragraph 1 above, to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, through the Committee on Conferences, proposals on the possibility of biennializing this item.